

It's Farm Time

Farms are so much more than crops and animals or fields and tractors. Farms serve as a primary source of food for everyone. Farms provide various types of foods, and typically, there is something available for everyone's taste and pleasure. Introducing young children to farms and nutrition education at an early age is extremely beneficial. Visiting farms allows children to see firsthand how fruits and vegetables are planted, fertilized, maintained, and harvested. Children can learn about the different types of farms and the foods which they supply. Visiting farms also allows children to understand the connection between nutrition education and agriculture.

Collaborations between farmers and child care facilities are rapidly developing across the country in order to assist young children with establishing healthy eating habits. Farm to Child Care programs, also referred to by some as Farm to Preschool, promote nutrition education for children and families, community involvement, and local food sourcing. Farm to Child Care programs involve a variety of team members, including preschool staff, farmers, families, children, teachers, community members, and food service employees. Each group plays an important role in implementing the program and making it a true success for everyone.



Participating in Farm to Child Care

Currently, there is not a national Farm to Child Care program, but there are several pilot and ongoing program models across the country. The Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) at Occidental College has a variety of resources available to implement at child care facilities. Their website, www.farmtopreschool.org, has nutrition education curriculums, preschool gardening information, local food sourcing, and various other great resources. The website also provides a very detailed list of state and local pilots and ongoing Farm to Child Care programs. Check out their website for more information.

Components of Farm to Child Care

According to UEPI, Farm to Child Care can consist of a variety of different components. Each component introduces a different task for having a lifelong effect on young children's health and wellness.

These components include:

- Providing locally grown foods in the child care facility for both meals and snacks.
- Increasing the availability of locally grown foods to providers, families, and the community.
- Using nutrition based curriculums with taste testing and food preparations.
- Gardening.
- Taking field trips to farms and hosting guest speakers in the classroom.
- Visiting community gardens, local farmers markets, and local farms.
- Hosting parent workshops.
- Establishing and implementing a wellness policy, including farm to preschool principles and objectives.
- Impacting and influencing policies.

While each of these components contribute to a successful Farm to Child Care program, not all components are required for a program to be operational. For example, a Farm to Child Care program can operate successfully with only three or four components.



Steps for Starting a Farm to Child Care Program

Farm Aid designed a Farm to School toolkit that focuses on transforming school cafeterias with the family farm. They have seven easy steps to starting a Farm to School program that can be easily transferred to Farm to Child Care.

1. **Do Your Homework** – Research other successful Farm to Child Care programs. Schedule interview sessions to obtain steps to success. Also, check out local farms and gardens to see what is available.
2. **Start a Conversation** – Ask people to assist you with starting a program, including farmers, parents, teachers, community members, food service employees, and other interested people.
3. **Organize the First Meeting** – Set a time for the first meeting and market to the children, parents, community, and local farmers.
4. **Take Inventory** – Examine how much food is needed from a local farmer. Examine how much food the farmer can supply. Create a budget that meets the facility's budgetary needs.
5. **Think Big** – When planning, examine the big picture. Plan how the collaboration will benefit young children. Include steps and procedures for enhancing nutrition education.
6. **Create a Timeline** – Design a timeline that meets the needs of the children, center staff, and other major contributors to the Farm to Child Care program.
7. **Look to the Future** – Now that you have a basic plan, begin networking, partnering, and implementing the program. Don't be afraid to ask for help; people generally want to help, but often don't know how.

Remember, there is not a standard Farm to Child Care program, but there are many successful model programs. Customize these steps to fit your needs.



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Five Strategies for Success

If you are unable to establish a Farm to Child Care program but still wish to incorporate farming ideas in the classroom, there are several strategies to be successful.

Strategy #1 Plant a Garden. Gardens can be planted in a variety of ways. There are raised gardens, gardens in buckets, plants in cups, solar gardens, and various other types. Choose the best fit for your facility.

Strategy #2 Host a monthly community meeting to discuss different strategies for developing a community garden.

Strategy #3 Invite a farmer and a registered dietician (RD) to do a parent workshop. The farmer and RD can collaborate to discuss where foods come from and why it is important to eat a variety of healthy foods.

Strategy #4 Visit a local grocery store or local nursery to talk about different fruits and vegetables.

Strategy #5 Choose a nutrition education curriculum such as *More Than Mud Pies* to use in your daily classroom. Select a specific time in the day to focus on nutrition education.



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Resources for Managing a Program

Farm to Preschool Models

- Farm to Preschool has a list of pilot and ongoing Farm to Preschool programs. Some programs include *Watch Me Grow* at Duke University and Hand in Hand Learning Center in Colusa, California.

Website: <http://www.farmpreschool.org/programmodels.html>

Curriculum

- NFSMI: *More Than Mud Pies* is a nutritional based curriculum offering a variety of season based activities.

Website: <http://nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=247>

- NFSMI: *CARE Connection* is a nutritional based curriculum offering a variety of classroom activities for young children. Some activities include physical activity, food preparation, and music.

Website: <http://nfsmi-web01.nfsmi.olemiss.edu/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=199>

- Wisconsin Department of Health Services: *Got Veggies* is a garden-based nutrition education curriculum designed to teach children about fruits and vegetables and get children to eat more of them.

Website: http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/pdf_files/Got%20Veggies/GotVeggiesweb12mb.pdf

- USDA: *Grow It, Try It, Like It Preschool Fun with Fruits and Vegetables* is a kit designed to teach children about gardening and fruits and vegetables.

Website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/growit.html>



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Farms and Gardening Information

- National Farm to School Network offers information about local farmers. They also have a subgroup committee site that is designed for Farm to Preschool.
Website: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/resources.php>
Website: <http://www.farmtopreschool.org/>
- The USDA *People's Garden Initiative* is a community garden site established to expand the availability of garden resources.
Website: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PEOPLES_GARDEN
- LocalHarvest is a website designed to help locate farmers markets, family farms, and various other resources.
Website: <http://www.localharvest.org/>
- Farmersmarket.com is a great resource and gives locations for purchasing locally grown food.
Website: <http://farmersmarket.com/>

***Disclaimer: Always contact your state agency about receiving food directly from a farm or growing it for use in the CACFP.

Sources

- Farm Aid. (2010). *Farm aid's farm to school 101 toolkit: Transforming school cafeterias with the family farm*. Retrieved from, http://www.farmaid.org/atf/cf/%7B6ef41923-f003-4e0f-a4a6-ae0031db12fb%7D/FARM_TO_SCHOOL_101-FARM_AID_TOOLKIT.PDF
- Jackson, E. (n.d.). *NC family impact seminar: Farm to preschool*. Retrieved from, <http://www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/events/FIS/Jackson2011.pdf>
- Urban & Environmental Policy Institute Occidental College. (2012). *Farm to preschool*. Retrieved from, <http://www.farmtopreschool.org/home.html>
- William, S. (n.d.) Farm to preschool: Curriculum. Retrieved from, http://www.agri.ohio.gov/public_docs/FarmToSchool/Farm%20to%20Preschool%20Curriculums.pdf

Nutrition Highlights

National Message – USDA 2010 Dietary Guidelines Communications Message Calendar

The theme for May to August is Foods to Reduce. During this time, the selected key message is “drink water instead of sugary drinks”. Remember the theme and selected message when planning activities for everyday activities. To obtain more information, follow the link at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/MyPlate/CommunicationsMessageCalendar.pdf>

National Association for Family Child Care

The National Association for Family Child Care will host their 22nd annual conference on July 26-28, 2012 in Atlanta, GA. This year’s theme is “The Magic of Family Child Care”. The keynote speakers are Enrique Feldman and Jason Kotecki. NAFCC will have a variety of trainings and workshops, opportunities to network, and it will be an event you won’t want to miss. NFSMI will complete a session on Saturday, July 28 at 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm. Also, you can find us in the exhibiting hall distributing free resources. Register today at http://nafcc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=636&Itemid=491

NFSMI Trainings

NFSMI has a variety of online child care courses available. All online courses are free of charge and can be accessed at any time. Check out our online courses by following the link: <http://www.nfsmi.org/Templates/TemplateDefault.aspx?q=cEIEPTIzNg==>



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